

**SERVICE QUALITY BY A FACILITIES MANAGEMENT COMPANY IN
DRAGON LAKE RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

Facilities management has developed for more than twenty years in China; it is still at the infancy stage. China's entry into WTO brings opportunities as well as challenges to the trade of facilities management. In order to survive and develop in such a situation, it is necessary the enterprise to improve the service quality of facilities management and establish a service quality system which is focus on customers. The thesis firstly introduced the present situation of the service quality of facilities management in China and research done on this aspect both at home and abroad. Then it presented an in-depth analysis in the following respects such as service, service quality and its measurement subsequently, it explores the necessity of structuring the measurement system of service quality in facilities management. Finally, the thesis presented a service quality measurement framework by carrying out an empirical research on the Chongqing Longhu Facilities Management Company. The author adopted a holistic measurement method - SERVQUAL to analyze the service quality of Dragon Lake Residential Community which was managed by this company, and found the critical incidents that influence the service quality in this property. Based on the research results, the author also gave recommendations, aimed to improve the service quality by setting standardization and customizing service, enacting customer expectation management, optimizing service remediation, managing service commitment, strengthening the information-based construction and improving the satisfaction of employee etc. As the service quality measurement on Facilities Management is a brand-new research filed in most areas of China, there are not many research results existing at present. This thesis intended to construct a measurement method of service quality which may direct the enterprise to enact self-improvement and establish a resalable consumption of Facilities Management so as to enhance its competitive ability and promote its healthy development. The research result showed "customers" and "the service process" was identified as the most critical factors for the company and such a result can bring certain value to improve the service quality not only in property in the case study, buy also the Facilities Management industry in the region.

Key Words: Facilities Management, Service Quality, Service Quality Gap Analysis, Customer Perception and Expectation.

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CHAPTER 1

ISSUES ON SERVICE QUALITY IN FACILITIES MANAGEMENT

1.1 Introduction

Facilities management is a professional, social, and enterprise service industry. Its content is to keep the building itself and the affixed supporting equipment as well as environment under the scientific and systematic management and ensure that all of them are in their best conditions and can be used normally. The final goal of it is to maintain and increase the facilities' value. Facilities management has its root in United States of America. Until now, it has the history of more than one hundred years. Facilities management is gaining increasing recognitions as a significant contributor to the Real Estate industry

The first Chinese facilities management company was established on 10th March, 1981 in Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province. Even if it had 20 years non-stop development, the industry was still in its initial phase compared with western country, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Although the facilities management industry in China has the relative short history, after more than 20 years improving

and learning, the pace of development of facilities management in China is becoming more and more rapid and towards to the professionalized, marketized, industrialized facilities management system.

Based on the rough estimate by China Property Management Institute (CPMI) in 2006, there are more than 20,000 facilities management companies in china with the employees of more than 2,000,000. The FM industry in China has its own areas which include the service items such as the maintenance of building and its affixed equipment, community security, cleaning, landscaping, support service to the resident, the sale and purchase of the community property etc. In last year, the facilities management and its relative industry create the GDP of around 500 million US dollar.

The current trend in the facilities management industry is now mostly focus on the service. With the rising expectations of the people and the living standard, there is an urgent need for the facilities management organization to raise their standard of the service. Quality is now the cornerstone of competitive strategies for the facilities management providers seeking to widen as well as to secure their client base (Pheng and Hong, 2005). There are many who have emphasize on the significance of physical product quality studies have been conducted recently in the FM industry and influenced the growth of quality assurance systems in accordance with the ISO 9000 series (Kam and Tang, 1997; Shammash-Toma et al.). However, in the facilities management industry, there is not only the aspect of the physical products, actually, it is highly customer-involved, because one feature of the facilities management is provide the property service in the residents-occupied circumstances. The global competitive arena has compelled facilities management provider to constantly find the new ways to gain a competitive edge.

1.2 Research Background

Nowadays, it is easily observed that quality is one of the most recognized criteria in the manufacturing and service literature. Satisfaction with quality can be seen as one and possibly the major performance criterion in the management of facilities services (Heavisides and Price, 2001). This is also acknowledged by Varcoe (1993) who considers the three key performance criteria for FM to be costs, delivery and quality. Furthermore, the driving forces regarding services today are the understanding and improvement of the service processes that, from the customer's viewpoint, bring value. The service concept of a combination of events that flow together to form an experience, where production and consumption cannot be totally separated and where the clients often actively participate in the production process, is to be perceived as extremely complex (Grönroos, 2000).

The measurement of quality is theoretically just as simple; it is merely the metrics of determining how well, how effectively and how efficiently needs are met. However, there is no simple way to measure services due to the complexity of the service concept (van Looy *et al.*, 1998). Measurement provides information and information is the key to the proactive role that the FM function has, i.e. to predict change and thus optimize strategic decisions to meet the client's needs.

Without facts assumptions and misperceptions will defeat whatever reason and good judgment can bring to the effort (Heskett *et al.*, 1997). One of the major risks is that the FM function lacks the information to make it possible to execute a correct performance and planning function, which requires relevant measurement systems that provide the essential information (Pheng, 1996). Therefore, in order to ease the planning and handling of change, the FM function should implement a system to measure its performance. Lynch and Cross (1995) also state that this

system can become a catalyst for continual improvement and help managers and workers to motivate operations to continually improve towards customer expectations and to identify and eliminate waste of both time and resources.

The primary function of FM is the management and integration of various professions to support a core process (van Wagenberg, 1997). Examples of the various professions involved are the management of financial resources, human resources, physical resources, information resources and knowledge resources (Nutt, 2000). In any business, the clients are the most important factor for survival. This is put to its extremes in FM where the core business should be to continually make the client more competitive by understanding his needs better than himself and then provide the necessary services.

The study chooses Dragon Lake Residential Community as the research case - a well-known residential property developed by Longhu Real Estate Group. This research was conducted to study the service quality from the perspective of both customers and the service providers, all of whom had the experience in service providing and receiving encounter. The great aim of the study is that to measure if the customers in specific facilities satisfy and receiving excellent service performance provided by the facilities management company.

According to van Wagenberg (2001) a common view is that FM constitutes facilities services together with its management when it is just *facilities services management*. This research, however, is delimited to focus on the delivery and management of facilities services. Therefore, when the term FM is used it is only the delivery and management of facilities services that is considered.

1.3 Problem Statement

As a service industry, the management level of facilities management has the direct influence of the service quality of the facilities management enterprise, and this can be reflected in the service quality satisfaction and the complaint rate. It is so difficult to survive in the FM service market today in China, as we notice that after China joined the World Trade Organization, the facilities management market faces the huge challenge from the mature overseas professional facilities management companies. Their obvious advantage can be identified as low cost and price with the relatively high quality. In another side, our country's situation is that the relative FM service still in the low quality and with high price. The increasing number of facilities management organizations also indicates there is fierce competition with another organization to get the FM service contract. Previously, the strategy of operation of FM organization was mainly focused on lowering the price to dominate the market, but now, this trend and strategy is not suitable and successful in the Chinese FM industry. Therefore, in the global competitive arena today it has compelled FM providers to constantly find the new strategy to gain a competitive edge. There is a possibility for a well-reputed FM provider to develop more attractive service. Hence, service quality may be the main or only differentiating element in the eyes of the clients as it cannot be simply and easily copied and duplicated.

Recently, in the survey conducted by the China Consumer Association (China Property Management Institute, 2006) last year revealed that the complaints relative to facilities management have a quite high proportion, in some extreme cases, even conducted some serious conflicts between the FM staffs and the residents. The unsystematic management, insufficiency of service quality as well as relative low employee's individual quality are also concluded as the main cause of the high complaint rate of the facilities management service industry in the country.

There is an eminent feature of this industry in China that is the imbalance of development. Some eastern provinces like Guangdong and Shanghai, as the seedbed of the industry, have the quite long development period, absorbing the advanced experiences of operational management from the region of Hong Kong and western developed country made them represent the highest level of the industry in terms of the service quality, the customer satisfaction, the sophistication, etc. While in west part of china, merely introduced the facilities management since the early of 1990's, due to the short development history, there is still a certain gap existed between the western and the eastern province of the country.

The FM service delivery is different from new facilities construction. A unique distinctive feature of FM service is the high likelihood of working in the occupied buildings. So, in that situation the FM service providers are working closely with the buildings occupants. Thus, customers in occupancy during the FM service delivery process tend to communicate with the service staffs, and even involved in the delivery process. In this circumstance, the quality service is seen as an important way for FM service providers to gain competitiveness and a way of providing added value to FM service.

In FM service, determining quality service dimensions and customer satisfaction in market competition is important but the problem is that hard to identify the current level of the FM service and which of the quality service dimensions or attributes of the FM services that contribute the overall customer satisfaction levels. Moreover, efforts in defining and measuring the attributes of the customer quality service in FM service are not fully known. (CPMI China, 2006)

Furthermore, due to the intangible nature of services, quality service is inherently more difficult to measure than product quality. Measuring quality service

seems to pose difficulties for service providers because of the unique characteristics of service: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability (Bateson, 1995). This has made the factors or attributes more difficult to identify. Quality service also varies from customer to customer, from service provider to service provider and from product to product.

Managers in the facilities management service organization are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that their services are customer-focused and that continuous performance improvement is being delivered. Given the financial and resource constraints under which FM service organizations must manage it is essential that customers expectations are properly understood and measured and that, from the customers ' perspective, any gaps in service quality are identified. This information then assists the manager in identifying cost-effective ways of closing service quality gaps and of prioritizing which gaps to focus on – a critical decision given scarce resources.

To sum up, the purpose of this project to identify the service quality dimensions, to investigate the customers' expectation and perception of the quality of the FM service in the Dragon Lake Resident Community both from the client perspective and the service staff perspective and to give suggestion to the FM service provider how to improve the service by clarifying service quality gaps and identifying the factors which have the great influence on the customer service perception.

1.4 Research Objective

The major objectives of this research project are:

- i) To elicit the service quality dimensions that should be provided by the facilities management provider in daily FM service
- ii) To investigate the expectation and perception of the service quality of the FM service from the residents' perspective
- iii) To identify the critical factors those influence the service quality from the perspective of staffs

1.5 Scope of the Research

This study is carried out to elicit the service quality dimensions as well as to investigate the community residents' expectation and perception about the service quality in FM service and to identify the critical factors that influence the service quality, then to find out the problems existing in the community holistically. Finally, to give suggestion to the FM service provider how to improve the service and maximize the service quality to satisfy the residents

This study will focus on the perspectives of clients and the service staffs who had experience in service encounter in the subject resident community. The Dragon Lake Garden Resident Community in Chongqing City, China was selected for this project as the subject property. The subject resident community comprises of 8 high-rise apartment buildings, and the current population is more than 3,000. The research mainly concentrates on the feedback from the end users residing in these facilities, at the same time, the information from the service staffs also collected

through questionnaire forms mailed.

1.6 Significance of the Research

As the service quality evaluation of facilities management is a brand-new research filed in most areas of China, there are not many research results at present. This thesis intends to construct a way to evaluate the service quality that directs the enterprise to enact self-improvement to enhance its competitive ability and promote its healthy development. The research result is of certain value to improve the service quality of the facilities management industry.

Furthermore, the research is important because in order for facilities management providers to provide a high quality service and to meet or exceed clients' expectations, there is a need to find out the gap, which exists between the service quality expected by clients and that provided by the facilities management organizations. This study is also important for the FM Company because it offers facilities management provider the feedback relating to customers' expectations and perception of their service quality, how they are performing in terms of service quality, and the areas of improvement in order to provide quality service that will satisfy their customers. By managing service quality, the facilities management provider may differentiate itself by offering superior customer service. This helps them to survive in the intensely competitive FM environment.

The research also useful to help FM providers to identify and measure the service they would provide during managing the property assets. The knowledge and information from this research perhaps can be using to improve the process in selecting facilities management providers for a certain project property and construct the excellent relationship with the property occupier.

The author also hopes that the outcome from this study could provide in one way or other the necessary information and knowledge for the other parties that involved in the FM service industry.

1.7 Research Methodology Brief

The research methodology is designed based on the following approach:

I. Reviewing on the existing literature on FM, service quality, customer perception and expectation of the service quality, customer care and satisfaction, SERVQUAL instrument, critical incidents techniques and service quality gaps model in the context of FM. This review will provide a sound background of the subject matter and shall be used as guidance in development of the questionnaire survey form.

II. Two types of the questionnaire form containing series of questions was developed and issued to the community residents and the first-line staffs. One of the questionnaires is based on the SERVQUAL instrument and another one is developed on the critical incidents technique (CIT).

III. Analysis of the data and the descriptions collected from the survey. This can be carried out by using the quantitative analysis with the help from SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) Computer Package System and Microsoft Excel to verify the authenticity of the result.

Detailed research methodologies will be discussed in the Chapter 3

1.8 Structure of the Project Report

This project is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 – Issues on Service Quality in Facilities Management

This chapter provided the introduction to FM and the background of the research. It also contained the statement of problem, research objectives, scope of the research, research methodology brief and the structure of this project report.

Chapter 2 – Review on FM and Service Quality

This chapter presented the detailed study on topic, which was relevant to FM, service, quality, customer satisfaction and service quality measurement and the relationship between the expectation and the perception of the service quality as well as some techniques globally adopted currently in the service industry.

The depth of review includes some definition, formula, argument, analysis and relationship with this project research topic were being discussed in detailed to assist the development of the questionnaire survey and the interview.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology of Service Quality Study

In this chapter, the methodology employed for the research is being discussed in detail, including Reviewing on the existing literature, questionnaire data collection and analysis.

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